

IF ANY MAN...

"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Matt.16:24). In these words our Lord emphasizes that the decision to follow Him is by man's own free will-"if any man will come". This decision is a voluntary response to His call. There is no compulsion except the compelling force of His love. He draws us "with bands of love" (Hos.11 :4), and "We love him, because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

Deny himself:

Our Lord then lays down three conditions for true discipleship -"Let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me". Self is the root cause of sin. It is opposed to God. Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit believing the serpent when he said, "in the day ye eat thereof, ...ye shall be as gods" (Gen.3:5). They asserted their will against God's and disobeyed Him desiring to be equal with God. Sin thus entered the world and since then man's self is ever opposed to the will of God. Hence our Lord's first condition for discipleship is "Deny yourself". But Peter, to whom these words were spoken, denied the Lord instead of denying himself. He chose the easy way of escape through self-will, self-confidence and self exaltation. The self in us should be crucified and the Lord enthroned in our hearts. The Lord enables us to do this when we choose to follow Him. Thereafter it is, "not I, but Christ liveth in me" (Gal.2:20).

Take up his cross:

This leads us to the fulfilling of the next condition, "Take up your cross". We submit ourselves to His discipline. The condemned criminals under the Roman Government were each given a cross, to carry to the place of crucifixion and to be crucified thereon. They had no choice. The Lord has a purpose for each one of us and in working it out He gives a cross to each. Paul had a cross and the Lord would not take it away though he prayed thrice for its removal. The Lord does not place the cross on our shoulders for us to carry in a grumbling, resigned way. He expects us to willingly take up the cross He gives us and carry it cheerfully, believing that it is the best He has to give us and is for His glory. The Lord took up and carried our cross of sin as though it were His. Having done that, He is ever near to help us carry the cross which He has given us.

Follow Me:

Then we fulfill the third condition, "Follow me". We should follow as a sheep follows its shepherd and a servant his master. "And run not before Him, whatever betide, In I joy or in sorrow still follow thy Lord ". Where are we to follow Him? The Lord was leading Peter to Calvary, but Peter failed Him at Gethsemane and denied Him at His trial. He was not found at Calvary. Yet the Lord did not leave him. He took hold of him after His resurrection and led him on to Pentecost. The self-willed Peter was Spirit-filled and became a mighty servant of the Lord. The Lord will lead us on to victory if we follow Him.

Would you be victorious?

Dear reader do you feel a sense of defeat in your Christian life? Do you find yourself doing what is not pleasing to the Lord in spite of all your prayers and strivings? Do you realize a lack of power in your life and feel that you do the several acts of service for the Lord by force or habit? The cause for all this is that self and not the Lord, is holding sway over your life. You have not responded to the Lord's call. Choose, Him as your Lord, deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Him. He will lead you on to victory.

If any man hear:

"...if any man hear my I voice, and open the door, I will come in to him"(Rev.3:20). So anxious is the Lord to be with you, that He not only invites you, saying, "Follow me", but He is even at your door! "Behold, I stand at the door and knock". He knocks while calling to make sure you hear Him. The distracting noises of the self try to crowd out His still small voice. But the Lord knocks on saying. "My sheep hear my voice" (John 10:27). He cannot leave you and go, because you are His sheep and He gave His life for you. " And therefore will the Lord wait, that he may be gracious unto you" (Isaiah 30:18). The latch is on the inside and it is you who should open the door and let Him in. He will come in and abide with you enabling you to live victoriously.

Victory that overcomes:

How real will be your victory? God's Word says, "If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small" (Prov.24:10). Do you find yourself inadequate to face the trials and temptations in your life? If that be so, your strength is small; you have not allowed Jesus to be your Lord. He tells us. "I have overcome the world". If He is your Lord, you will be an overcomer too. Yours will be a glorious victory that "overcomes the world". I was in adversity recently. It was a storm which the Lord had allowed to overtake me. But He came walking over it, assuring me, "It is I; be not afraid" (John 6:20). "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor.12:9). His peace and comfort filled my heart. "I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living". (Psalm 27:13). I humbly praise Him for his glorious victory. "If any man – Will come after me- Will hear my voice- Be in Christ- He is a new creature". Are you that man? D.S.M.